



A significant number of people may apply for public appointments and in particular for board member positions. Selection panels cannot take everyone forward to subsequent stages of assessment and so it is very important that applicants make a good job of their initial application.

Most, but not all, public appointments require people to make an initial application in writing. Selection panels assess these initial applications to decide whom to invite to second and subsequent stages of assessment. In most cases, this will be an interview. Interviews are often combined with other assessment activities that simulate what a board member will be expected to do when in post. For example it is not uncommon for people to be asked prior to interview to read and assess a board paper and then to be questioned about their views on the content of the paper by the selection panel.

Selection panel decisions are based purely on the quality of the evidence provided by applicants. In most cases, applications are anonymised and panels don't see details such as names and addresses until after they have decided who should be interviewed. Panels never get to see applicant monitoring information.

The application pack will include a person specification. In most cases this will be based on the core skills framework for appointments. A specification in this format will set out:

- the criteria for selection
- what evidence of meeting the criteria might look like (also called “indicators” or “descriptors”)
- how each of the criteria for selection will be tested.

There's an example of a criterion for selection set out in this format on page 4.

The criteria for selection will vary from public body to public body depending on the particular attributes that a given body needs people to bring at a particular time. Criteria might include:

- **Skills** - usually expressed as “the ability to...”, such as “the ability to work effectively as a member of a team” or “the ability to analyse complex issues and give your views on them.”.
- **Knowledge** - usually of a particular subject matter such as “Knowledge of the links between the various organisations that provide health and social care in Scotland”. Sometimes “working knowledge” is sought which means the board needs people who have applied their knowledge in practical circumstances.

- **Experience** - this can cover a wide range of criteria expressed in different ways. Here are some examples: “A successful track record of launching a social enterprise”; “First-hand experience of the barriers faced by people with mobility problems when seeking to use public transport services”; “At least two years’ experience as a practising solicitor in Scotland”.

Criteria for selection can clearly differ quite a lot. One of the roles of the selection panel is to ensure that they test different types of criteria appropriately. It is important for applicants to read and follow the advice that they are being given in the application pack and application form. These documents will give clear direction on what sort of evidence the panel is looking for.

- ❖ Applicants should not assume that the evidence provided is obvious when it comes to meeting the criteria, for instance by simply recounting job titles or job duties. That will sometimes be appropriate but often it will not.

For example if the criterion is “At least two years of experience as a practising solicitor in Scotland” then simply saying “I have been practising law with ABC family lawyers in Dundee for the past ten years” is appropriate evidence.

This same evidence, however, wouldn’t be sufficient to demonstrate that someone had a particular skill, such as team working, or a successful track record such as in settling claims.

The application pack and form should give an idea about how best to demonstrate that you meet a given criterion.

To make a successful application there is also some more general advice that applicants should follow.

- ❖ Applicants should try to avoid assertion. Simply stating that one meets a specific criterion isn’t very good evidence, particularly in relation to skills. Here are two examples of applicants making that mistake:

*“I always work well in teams”.*

*“I know a lot about the links between organisations that provide health and social care”*

In the first case, an example that demonstrates the team working ability would be needed – not just this simple statement.

In the second case, the applicant would be better served by listing/describing the types of different organisations involved in health and social care provision and the relationships that exist between them as that would demonstrate to an extent that the applicant has the knowledge that is sought.

❖ Where possible, use the first person – “I” not “We”.

This is important because the panel has no way of knowing whether an applicant personally knows something or did something, or whether that is attributable to someone else. The panel is looking for evidence that relates specifically to the applicant as opposed to the group or organisation that the applicant belonged to and/or worked for.

The following are examples of applicants not making it clear that they personally meet the criteria:

*“I am a policy officer with XYZ charity. We do lots of work with organisations involved in health and social care provision”.*

*“We managed to review a very complex IT contract and concluded that it would not be appropriate for our organisation”.*

In these cases the panel will be unable to tell precisely what the applicant knows or is capable of. It might feel uncomfortable to set out evidence in this way at first but it is essential to be clear and specific about your role, contribution and skills.

To illustrate in more detail the right and wrong way to go about completing an application, this document provides a more complete example on pages 4 & 5.

**Here is the criterion that applicants are asked to respond to as set out in the person specification:**

<b>Ability</b>	<b>Descriptors/Indicators</b>	<b>How this will be tested</b>
The ability to influence key stakeholders to deliver outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can identify the people and/or organisations whose input is key to the delivery of a particular outcome</li> <li>• Is persuasive and able to influence such stakeholders to consider alternative courses of action by offering attractive solutions</li> <li>• Is able to help key stakeholders to understand the benefits of taking a particular course of action</li> <li>• Supports key stakeholders to deliver successful outcomes by following such recommended courses of action</li> </ul>	We will ask you to provide at least one example of influencing key stakeholders to deliver outcomes in your written application. The selection panel will ask follow up questions about this ability at interview.

**Here is how it looks in the application form:**

<p>Using no more than 350 words, please provide at least one example which best demonstrates your ability to influence key stakeholders to deliver outcomes. You may wish to include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a description of the situation and the people involved;</li> <li>• what skills you deployed;</li> <li>• the outcome; and</li> <li>• your personal contribution.</li> </ul>
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One of the applicants meets the criterion, and one does not.

On page 6, there is an explanation of why this is. Page 7 gives some more tips on how to structure answers to criteria for selection.

## **Response from applicant A**

I am the Chief Executive of a significant third sector organisation and am responsible for expenditure in excess of £200 million per annum. I could not fulfil my role successfully unless I regularly influenced key stakeholders and my ability to do so has made me successful. In my last post as External Relations Manager, it was essential that I influenced our key stakeholders to deliver outcomes as an everyday part of my job. I mapped out our key opportunities to influence on a stakeholder engagement calendar and sent my list of senior influencers a monthly highlights briefing on our work. I established excellent working relationships with them that significantly benefited my organisation. I reported on my activity to the SMC on a quarterly basis. My reports were always warmly received.

## **Response from applicant B**

In 2013 I was tasked with evaluating my organisation's engagement with voluntary sector stakeholders following an accusation of organisational bias against that sector from a member of a committee we convened. In the course of interviewing the complainant, it became apparent the bias was the perceived degree of influence of one specific national agency over our activities. This was, in the complainant's view, preventing smaller organisations speaking freely at committee meetings for fear of publicly disagreeing with their key funder. Having established this, and noting the number of representatives of the agency across the organisation's committees, I had to find a solution that addressed the concerns of the complainant whilst not compromising our relationship with the agency or suggesting their contribution was unwelcome. I arranged an away day with all the organisation's stakeholders from the voluntary sector, using a critical friend from an independent organisation to facilitate discussions. This allowed the complainant to air their views in a safe space and allowed me to ascertain that the perception was widely held. I then arranged a meeting with the Chief Executive of the agency concerned to discuss the issue. I framed it as a reputational risk for the agency and offered a solution for addressing that risk. He agreed that the proposed solution would be effective – that one representative of the agency could attend multiple committees instead of multiple representatives attending one committee apiece – which addressed the perception of overrepresentation without compromising our relationship. I produced an action note from the away day capturing the purpose, challenges and learning. I disseminated the note to inform business planning and internal protocols and it was also shared with all committees and published on the external website in line with our values of transparency and fairness. Feedback on the revised arrangements from the initial complainant was very positive as has been extensive public and stakeholder comment on our revised working arrangements.

## Assessment of answers

Applicant A's response doesn't provide good evidence that they meet the criterion because:

- They have simply rephrased the criterion in the first sentences. Rephrasing or paraphrasing the criterion does not represent evidence that it's been met.
- They list some of the tasks they regularly performed in their job without explaining how or why they went about them and what the outcome of performing the tasks was.
- The applicant uses an acronym – SMC – that will mean nothing to the panel and doesn't explain what it means or why it is relevant to this criterion.
- The applicant makes a number of unsubstantiated assertions – that they established excellent working relationships that benefited their organisation, and that their reports were warmly received – but offers no evidence to back these up.

Applicant A will not be invited to interview as this is an essential criterion for the role and they haven't provided evidence on the form that they possess the required ability.

Applicant B's response meets the criterion because:

- They have given a specific example that provides evidence not just assertion.
- The example given clearly addresses the indicators in the person specification.
- It's clear what the applicant did, the reasons for their action, what happened, what they took into account, and the outcome – they have used "I" statements.
- The applicant hasn't used acronyms or jargon so the evidence is easy to read and consider against the criterion.

Applicant B has provided sufficient evidence that they meet this essential criterion for the role.

## Tips for Making a Successful Application

- Follow the instructions in the pack and the form about the type of evidence that you should be providing. Generally speaking:
  - to demonstrate abilities, working knowledge or a track record you will usually be asked for a worked example
  - to demonstrate simple experience you will usually be asked to give life history and/or CV type information
  - to demonstrate knowledge you will usually be asked to answer relevant questions and/or to confirm that you have a relevant qualification in the subject matter.
- Avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Write for the reader who may not know your employer, job or sector.
- Be clear and succinct. You may well be asked to expand on your answers at interview.
- When asked for examples, give specific examples describing actual events rather than a generalised description of what you would usually do.
- Draw on examples which best demonstrate your skills, working knowledge or track record in that area.
- Use different examples across the range of criteria to demonstrate a breadth of experience.
- Don't worry about using examples that aren't from the workplace – examples can be drawn from volunteering or your personal life as long as they provide good evidence you've met the criteria.
- Set out clearly your personal involvement in any examples that you give. It is how you carried out the piece of work that the panel is interested in. When providing examples you will usually want to include the following:
  - what you did and how you did it – use “I” not “we”.
  - how frequently you did what you did and over what period.
  - if recency is mentioned, explain how recently you did what you did.
  - the outcome – try to demonstrate that what you did made a positive difference
  - Include any positive feedback that you received and especially evidence that your input made the difference. This could include peer and/or public recognition about the value of a given piece of work or internal or external formal appraisals that verified your personal impact.

